

**Lesson Plan 3: When is a rug not a rug? A cultural comparison: The Kurds and The Turkmen**  
Social Studies, Language Arts and Visual Arts

**Objectives:**

Explore the houses and homes of others, comparing similarities and differences between ways of living - and the Kurds and Turkmen ways of living.

Discover the artwork of the Kurds and the Turkmen.

Use personal observations and ideas to design a *sufra* or an *ensi*.

**Activities:**

When is a rug not a rug? When it is a door or used as a cloth to place food on.

◆ Look carefully at the two images of woven fabric.

Ask a series of questions. Which one do you think is the door carpet and which one is the cloth to place food on? What do you see on the designs?

Both are used to honour guests into ones home. One is called an *ensi* and the other is called a *sufra*.

◆ Read information on the " Turkmen and Ensi fact sheet".

◆ Read information on the " Kurds and Sufra fact sheet".

◆ The students can answer questions on the "*ensi* and *sufra* question sheets".

◆ What do you do to welcome guests into your home? Fill in the "welcome guest sheet" and write down similarities and differences compared to the Kurds and Turkmen.

◆ Write an essay (one page) about a time a visitor came to your house (recollection/story telling) or alternatively how you would make a visitor welcome to you house (organisation/ideas/social acceptable behaviour). Consider whether it would make a difference who the visitor is for example, whether it is a Kurdish girl or a Turkmen adult?

Both the *ensi* and *sufra* are made up of patterns, set in a rectangular design, separated by borders. A pattern is made up of a single design element called a *motif* and by repeating the motif a pattern design is created.

◆ Draw 4 motifs that symbolise you on the "motif sheet".

◆ Use these motifs to design your own *sufra* or *ensi*.

◆ Extension lesson to create your own paper weaving.

**Assessment:**

Evaluate responses on "welcome guests sheet".

Evaluate the essay written about their visitor.

Evaluate motif designs and how well they incorporated these motifs to make a design pattern in their *ensi* or *sufra* designs.

**Resources:**

Image of the *ensi* and *sufra*

Kurds and *Sufra* Fact Sheet

Kurds and *Sufra* Question and Answer Sheet

Turkmen and *Ensi* Fact Sheet

Turkmen and *Ensi* Question and Answer Sheet

Welcome Guests Sheet

Motif Sheet

Kurdish Sufra



Turkmen Ensi



## Turkmen and Ensi Fact Sheet



### Turkmen

Turkmen is the official language of the Republic of Turkmenistan. Of the approximately 3.1 million speakers, the majority, a little over 2 million, live in Turkmenistan. Speakers also live in Iran, Afghanistan and to a lesser extent in Turkey, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, the USA and Germany.

Turkic-speaking groups had entered the southwestern region of Central Asia by the 5th and 6th centuries, gradually changing it from an Iranian-speaking to a Turkic-speaking area. The decisive influx came when Oghuz tribes (originally from Mongolia) migrated into the area in the 10th century. During this same period the term Turkmen was first used to refer to these people. By the 14th and 15th centuries the Oghuz tribes in Turkmenistan had become to be regarded as a single people. Although they shared common traditions and the same language subnational and clan consciousness was still apparent. The Turkmen travelled in groups or tribes and had what you call a nomadic lifestyle. They lived in yurts (called a *ger* in Turkmen), a form of tent but after Russia had conquered Turkestan in the mid 1800s, the Russian government exerted strong pressure on the nomadic peoples to adopt a sedentary lifestyle and settle permanently in villages, towns, and cities. The Turkmenistan Republic was founded on October 27, 1924.

### Ensi

Home is where one receives one's guests as they come through the doorway, and asks them to feel at home. Special door carpets, called *ensis*, are woven by the Muslim Turkmen to be used specifically as a hanging door to a *ger* for special occasions, such as a festival or the receiving of a special guest. Interestingly —

and the c.1890 *ensi* in this exhibition offers a splendid instance of this — the design often resembles that of a 'head-and-shoulders' prayer rug, with borders surrounding a central motif that emulates the *mihrab* (prayer niche) that, in a mosque, focuses those praying in the direction (*qibla*) of Makka. Thereby honouring the guest who enters through the doorway hung with such an *ensi*.

## Turkmen and Ensi Question and Answer Sheet

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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Circle the correct answer or copy out the question and answer

What countries border Turkmenistan?

Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan

Iran, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan

Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India

Of the 3.1 million Turkic speakers how many live in Turkmenistan?

a. 1 million

b. 0.2 million

c. 2 million

In what centuries had Turkic-speaking groups entered Central Asia?

a. 6th and 7th

b. 5th and 6th

c. 4th and 5th

In the 10th century the Oghuz tribe migrated to Central Asia, where were they originally from?

a. China

b. India

c. Mongolia

What centuries were the Turkmen considered one people?

a. 17th and 18th

b. 14th and 15th

c. 13th and 14th

What kind of lifestyle did the Turkmen have before the Russians conquered.

a. wild

b. sedentry

c. nomadic

What is the name of structures they lived in?

a. yert

b. tepee

c. marquee

What religion is the Turkmen?

a. Christian

b. Muslim

c. Buddist

Ensi is a special door carpet. How is it made?

a. sewn

b. crocheted

c. woven

Is an ensi used everyday?

a. No, only at weekends

b. Yes

c. No, only for special occasions

## Kurds and Sufra Fact Sheet

### Kurds

As a people, the Kurds are unique in the Near and Middle East in their desire for a home (defined as an independent polity under their full control) as this has remained unfulfilled after eighty-five years of geopolitical maneuverings in that region, since the middle of World War I.

Kurds are an ancient Indo-European language group of Southwest Asia. The "Kurdish" language has two main branches Kurdish and Kurmanji.

The total population of about 16 million Population distribution among the Kurds.

Turkey - 43%

Iran - 31%

Iraq - 18%

Syria - 6%

Caucasus - 2%

There are 3 main Kurdish religions, one is Yezidism commonly called the Cult of Angels. Malak Tawas was the first Archangel of the Great Creating Spirit or God as we know him. Malak Tawas was given dominion over earth. He is often represented as a great bird usually called a peacock but the birds that were in that area were actually great bustard.

### Sufra

The honoring of guests within the home is found across diverse cultures. Some produce particular household objects specifically to perform that function. Thus a *sufra*, for example, endemic to the Kurds - *sufra* is a Persian word - is a colorfully-woven carpet that is used as a cloth on which food is laid before a special guest. The *sufra* in this exhibition comes from the Kurds of Khurasan in Iran.

The designs of Kurdish tribal and village rugs are often derived from elaborately drawn urban products. Kurdish weavers over years and centuries have transformed these drawings into the geometric forms and other shapes found in Kurdish weavings we know today. Older Kurdish weavings have strong natural dyes that improve with age. Red and blue are the dominant colours, the reds normally coming from the madder root but while in regions in Turkey cochineal dyes from insects were used until the 1920s to produce deep reds.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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### **Kurds and Sufra Question and Answer Sheet**

Circle the correct answer or copy out the question and answer

Do the Kurds have a homeland?

- a. Yes, it's called Kurdistan      b. No, they desire a home

What are the two main branches of "Kurdish" language?

- a. Kurdy and Kurmanji      b. Kurdish and Kurmanji      c. Kurdish and Kurmandish

What is the total Kurdish population?

- a. 12 million      b. 18 million      c. 16 million

What are the main countries that the Kurds inhabit?

- Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Spain, Caucasus
- Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Crete
- Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Caucasus

How many Kurdish religions are there?

- a. 4      b. 2      c. 3

In the Cult of Angels, Malak Tawak was the first archangel of the Great Creating Spirit. He represented as a:

- a. frog      b. insect      c. bird

What is a *sufra* used for?

- a. wiping your feet      b. lying on      c. to lay food on

What is the origin of the word *sufra*?

- a. Chinese      b. Persian      c. Russian

Kurdish weavers designs:

- a. are bright and colourful      b. have geometric forms and figures      c. Both A + B

The natural red dye comes from:

- a. Cedar roots and bees      b. Madder roots and insects      c. Tree branches and fish

Name

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### **Motif Sheet**

A motif is one element (it could be a shape, colour) or line that makes up a pattern.

Draw 4 simple shapes that you can make into a motif.

Name

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**Welcome Guest Sheet**

What do you do to welcome guests into your home?

In general:

For special occasions, such as birthdays, religious events or festivals:

Similarities to the Kurds and/or the Turkmen:

Differences to the Kurds and/or the Turkmen: